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General Structures, Literatures, and Problems of Libraries: Revisiting the State of Librarianship in Africa

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Abstract

The society we live in is in constant need of information to solve its problems. The library serves as the agency responsible for the collecting, processing, managing and disseminating of this information in various formats to meet the varying needs of the users. Information may be needed for education, entertainment, socio-cultural development etc. It is therefore the duty of the librarian to ensure that there is availability and accessibility to the required information whenever it is needed. This paper looks at the nature of libraries, the structures of libraries, the literature of libraries and common problems plaguing the delivery of library services in Africa. In order for the library to take its place in information management in Africa, several solutions were suggested. These solutions include: increased funding, ICT skill acquisition, resource sharing and networking etc.

Introduction

Librarianship is a service profession whose major objective is to create increased access to available information. In performing the great task of providing relevant information librarians perform various activities. It is these activities that define what a library is. In this regard, we can define a library as an organization or institution that selects, acquires, processes, organizes, stores and disseminates information in various formats to meet the varying needs of users (Nwalo, 2009). The library also functions as a social agency and a centre for incubating national development. To this end the library is a major point of concern to serious governments since information and knowledge are the key factors in the building of national wealth.

The study aims at looking at the nature of the library, the structures in a library, the literature of librarianship and the prevailing problems of libraries. Probable solutions will equally be proffered. It is the intention of the study to bring to the fore how best to organize and manage libraries to ensure their continuous relevance in the society.

The Concept of a Library

Libraries started as store houses for books, trade documents, biographies, tracts, agreements and such documents common to the ancient world. Kings and royal people as well as religious houses were the owners of the libraries of the ancient times. Although most of the ancient libraries cannot pass for what we call a library today, they however

serve the common purpose of preserving knowledge and making available information for societal development (access was highly restricted to a selected few). Organization of library resources as we now have it was not common place in the ancient libraries (Aiyebelehin, 2008).

From ancient times till this present dispensation the primary purpose of the library has not changed from that of creating access to information. Although today the library creates access to varieties of information in various formats and communicated through diverse media, the primary purpose of the library, that is, the creation of access to information has not changed. This is not to mean that the library is static, far from it. The library is a strategic organ of the society that evolves with the society.

Fourie and Dowell (2002) noted that “the story of the libraries begin with the history of the written record. The oral tradition, which relied on the memorization of history, legends, and folklore, was the form of preserving and transmitting data among people”. The development started with the development of written and the associated developments. Consequently as the society began to develop, the state of the library began to improve. This thought was captured in the work of Fourie and Dowell, 2002.

Ifidon and Ifidon (2008) asserted that the retention of some of the former definitions of the library, especially those that emphasize that the library is a place where records are kept and the librarian being a custodian of records, are an aberration of what the librarianship profession is in the light of modern developments in information management. What this portends is that librarians must continually keep abreast of the modern technologies in order to retain their value and relevance in the realm of information management.

Bryson (2006) equally observed that “in the last two hundred years, western societies have transitioned through economies and societies first based on agriculture, then on industry and now on knowledge. The magnitude of these changes is such that they are called revolutions and each one has challenged the way people work, think, live and communicate”. The import of the statement above is that information professionals are constantly required to do things differently in order to remain in control of the information sector especially in a world where everything revolves round information.

Although libraries started as store houses of historical documents, they have emerged over time to become a far reaching body of information resources and services that sometimes do not require a building. Therefore different authors have defined the concept of the library at different points of its existence.

Akindahunsi (2003) observed that libraries have passed through a series of historical developments and during the course of these developments various definitions have being given to it. According to him, a library is an organization that is entrusted with the acquisition, organization, preservation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in whatever format it may appear. In this sense, the library acts as an information agency responsible for the provision of timely information for research, development and any other purpose beneficial to the information user.

Even with revolution going in the library it is common to see most societies misplacing the library’s identity. This is evidenced in the way people use the word library. To some the library is just a place where books are kept and the librarian as a custodian of books. Contrary to this view Nwalo (2003) opined that the systematic acquisition, organization and dissemination of information materials, not mere labels distinguishes a library from either a reading room or a storehouse of books. In this light he defined a library as an institution “primarily set up to acquire, organise, store and make accessible to the users information materials which they require”.

The library as an institution is found in every sector of the society. Thus, we have academic libraries, that is, those libraries found institutions of higher learning such as the university, polytechnic, colleges of education and other degree awarding institutions. Public libraries are the most common types of libraries in modern societies. Public libraries have been on ground for centuries. They are commonly referred to as the people’s university. The services of the public libraries cut across class and character, that is, it has room for every individual in the society- from president to prisoner. We equally have the School libraries - those libraries situated in secondary, primary and nursery schools. The primary clientele of the school library are the pupils and teachers in the schools. The collections are tailored to meet the peculiar needs of the pupils. Research libraries are found in research institutions.

They are established to meet the information needs of researchers in research institutions. Industrial libraries are also common in industries and commercial organizations. They primarily provide information to support the activities R&D personnel. We must not forget the private library. Private libraries are the earliest types of libraries. Private libraries served as prestige items in the ancient times. Today, private libraries are operated by individuals who have high value for information. The collections of the private library reflect the subject interest of the owners (Ojo-Igbinoba, 2000).

As an after effect of the revolutions going on in the library scene, the concept of the library has expanded to the internet and other electronic form. Today, we now have what is variously referred to as the digital library, virtual library, library without walls and the online library.

A digital library has been variously defined. A comprehensive definition is provided by the Digital Library Federation. They see a digital library as Organizations that provide the resources including specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities (Igun, 2006).

Fourie and Dowell (2008) noted that the 1990's ushered in a new era for libraries and information centres because of the incredible growth seen in the electronic dissemination of information. This trend was most clearly seen in the explosion in use of the World Wide Web.

All the development efforts of the library at fast and effective services were realised or are being realised with the advent of digital libraries.

Ogogua, Emerole and Egwin (2007) defined a virtual library as a collection of files or documents, which are stored and accessed electronically. Again this definition brings to the fore the issue of access which is fundamental to the continual existence of the library. The digital library has become the bride of modern librarianship. With the facilities made available by the digital library the library is gradually growing into its role as the last resort and hub for societal development.

The Use of ICT in Libraries

The library is an agency in the society that helps in the development of the society through the storage, management and dissemination of useful information. Due to the fact that the society is an evolving entity, the library equally evolves with the society.

In this respect, Berkeley (1999) posited that social institutions today look vastly different than they did 20 years ago. A variety of forces, most specifically economic changes and technological developments, have reshaped and redefined our notions of what constitutes a bank, a service station, or a bookstore. Libraries are not immune to the societal forces re-shaping other institutions

Also Lavoie and Dempsey (2006) noted that much progress has been made in aligning library services with changing (and increasingly digital and networked) research and learning environments. At times, however, this progress has been uneven, fragmented, and reactive. As libraries continue to engage with an ever-shifting information landscape, it is apparent that their efforts would be facilitated by a shared view of how library services should be organized and surfaced in these new settings and contexts.

From the foregoing we can conclude that the use of information and communication technologies in libraries is born borne out of the need to cope with the trend and manage information more effectively. There is almost no area of the library where ICTs are not applied. Elisha (2006) did an extensive study on the application of ICTs in the academic library. Part of the areas where ICTs are presently being applied as identified by the study include: Online Access to Educational Resources, The Digital Reference Services, Manpower development: the study noted that besides the use of ICT to provide access to educational resources to library patrons, ICT can be used to facilitate on-the-job training and retraining of information professionals. As noted above ICT is developing at a pace very difficult to keep up with, as such there is need for the information professionals to know and follow trends in ICT.

Okogie (2002) did a research on the impact of ICTs on cataloguing and classification. The outcome of the research revealed that with advancement in technology and the sophistication of the library user, ICTs are employed in doing almost all the activities involved in organization of knowledge. While looking at the future of cataloguing and classification Okogie posited that “cataloguers will collaborate with strategic partners like Google, Amazon and book publishers, acquire and use new skills beyond those required in using MARC and AACR2... AACR3 will be launched and the new breed of librarians will be referred to as cyber librarians! Cataloguers will change their work flow from: acquire — catalogue — shelve to acquire — shelve — continually enhance metadata. Nwalo (2003) in his book on library routines clearly explained that ICTs are now the new bride of the library profession.

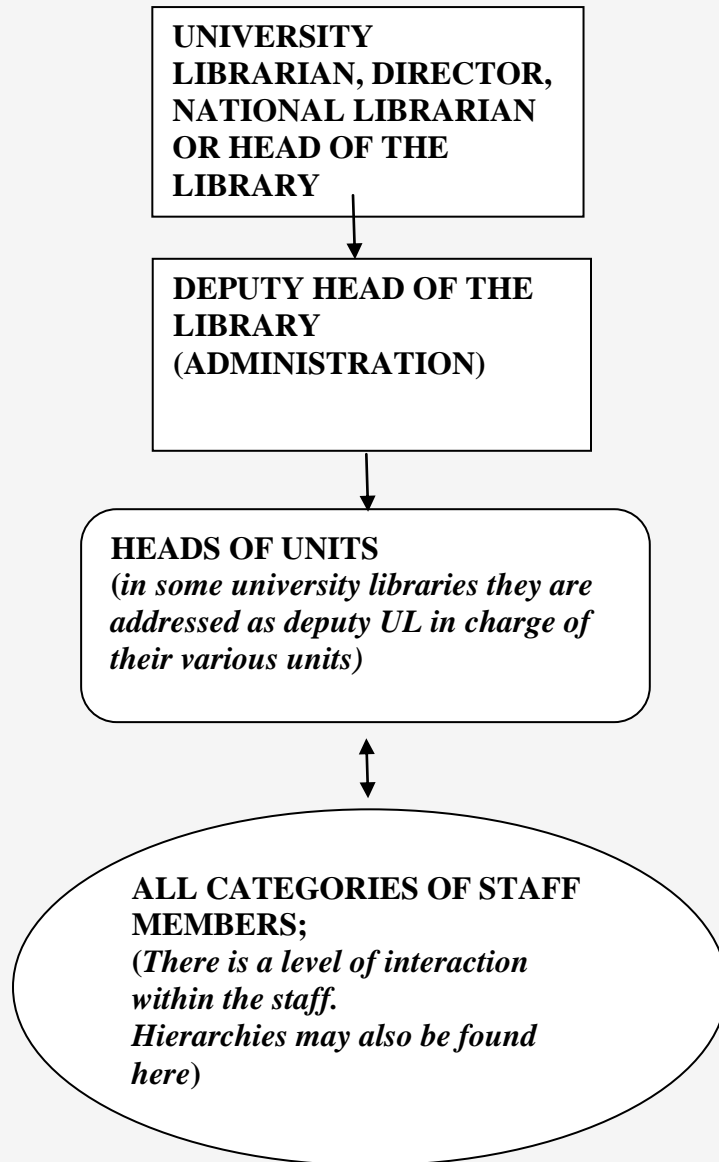
What all the above researches portend is the central function ICTs play in the advancement of the library as an agency for national development. Through the use of ICTs access to information has been greatly enhanced. For example, through online databases such as E-GRANARY, HINARI, AGORA, EBSCOHOST, JSTOR, LANTEEAL, BIOMED, AJOL and OARE, Kenneth Dike Library (university of Ibadan) has been able to provide access to over 1,005,482 journal titles (KDL manual, 2007). This is a feat that cannot be achieved with the manual system.

The Structure of the Library: Organizational Versus Functional Structures

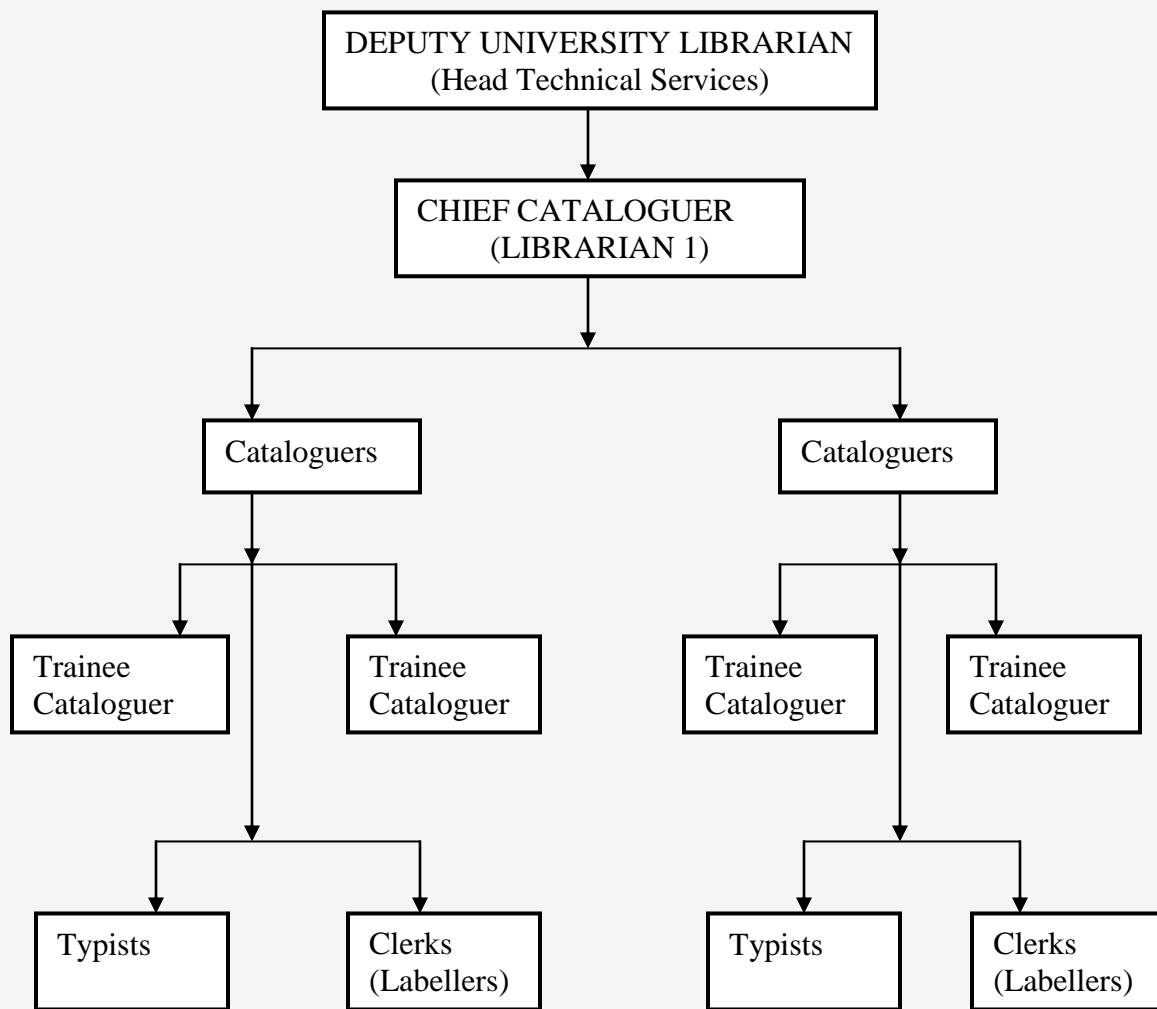
The library like any other system is made up of various interacting sections. For the purpose of proper organization and adequate administration, libraries of all types are structured either administratively, functionally or both. In most cases the functional structure also helps to detail the administrative chart of the library.

Ifidon and Ifidon (2008) noted that in all cases the structure starts from the head of the library to the heads of functional units. Within functional units other mini-structures can be established. The organizational structure helps to define the roles of everybody in the library system. When we structure a library along organizational structure line, we have the head of the library at the top followed by the deputy head in charge of administration. Then we have the heads of units and the staff members. As we earlier noted, structures may also exist within units. This is to stipulate authority and workflow.

Below are organizational charts for both the general library and a section within the library:



Organization structure of a typical library (Source: Modified From Ifidon And Ifidon, 2008).



The organisational chart for the cataloguing department of Fatiu Ademola Akesode library, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos. Source : Mr. J.A. Adigun (Chief Cataloguer)

The staff perform their duties as the hierarchy demands except in rare cases where overlapping may be required. What is paramount is that the overall objective of the library must be kept at sight.

For all libraries there is the challenge to create an environment where client and staff satisfaction can be achieved cost effectively. In large libraries there is the additional and significant challenge of how to best organize staff. Much of our organizational thinking of recent times has recognized the importance of teamwork, and especially where multi-disciplinary teams can work together, pooling their range of skills to produce a product or service (Williamson and Pattison, 2011).

Williamson and Pattison (2011) rightly opined that organizational structure is more than the positions within a library and their hierarchical relationship, as drawn on a structure chart. Structure encompasses decisions on individual roles, job descriptions and working relationships. When implementing organizational change involving new technology, deciding how the library will function, by way of its structure, is a critical next step after building a shared perception of organizational culture.

Along the line of functionality, a library is divided into sections. These sections must interplay appropriately to ensure effective and efficient library services. Traditionally, the sections of a library are:

- Administration division (head of the library and other administrative staff)
- The collection development division (selection and acquisition)
- The technical services division (cataloguing and classification, bindery etc)
- The readers' services (circulation, reference section, reserved book unit)
- Serial collections division

These sections of the library cannot exist in isolation. We shall undertake a brief examination of the sections and their respective functions in the library system.

Administration division:

In any library, this section is responsible for the day to day administration of the entire library. It is headed by the overall head of the library who may be called the university librarian (university library), national librarian (national library), director (state library or branch of a national library) etc. The title of the head of administration division depends on the structure and choice of nomenclature by the respective library. This unit takes care of planning, staffing, financing and general administration. The heads of various units are part of the overall administration. They report to the head of the library and the head of the library serves as the relationship officer between the library and the parent organization.

For the effective administration of a library, the head of the administration must possess good leadership skills and abilities. In addition planning must be taken as an essential part of the administration (Ifidon, 2006; Ifidon and Ifidon, 2008).

The collection development division (selection and acquisition):

As has been noted in other sections of this work the information resources serve as the bedrock for information services delivery. Aiyebilehin (2008) noted that for the library to justify the reason for its existence services must be provided, for services to be provided, materials must be acquired and for materials to be acquired there must be collection development.

The collection development division engages in the systematic building up of the library's collection of information materials. In doing this the unit does selection and acquisition of materials through laid procedures. The use of acquisition policy helps the unit to perform its job systematically.

The technical services division (cataloguing and classification, bindery etc):

This unit is one of the most important units of the library because it helps in the organizing of the materials thereby creating access to knowledge. If the materials are acquired without any form of organization the user will be frustrated and the library will not serve its purpose. The technical services unit therefore, through its cataloguing and classification activities, helps to save the time of the library users.

Iwuji (2002) observed that the technical services division especially cataloguing and classification unit bears very heavy work load. This is so because the output from this unit serves as the tool for rendering services to the library users. There is therefore constant demand on this unit to deliver. This unit engages in cataloguing and classification of information materials.

The readers' services (circulation, reference section, reserved book unit):

Just as the customer services unit of business organizations help in creating an image for the organization, the circulation helps in building the image of the library system. This is the first point of call in any library. Various services are rendered to the users from this unit. Ifidon (2000) noted that the objective of the Readers' Services Department is to fulfil the library's service mission by meeting users' information needs.

These services involve:

- The circulation of materials: This is the traditional function of the library whereby users are registered, books are charged out and discharged at regular or irregular intervals, and overdue and fine regimes are evolved;
- Shelf Management, which involves shelving of materials by the paraprofessional staff and shelf-reading by the senior professional staff. The aim is to ensure that every book is in the right place so that retrieval can be facilitated. Another way of making it easy for users to find what they want in the library is for the Readers' Services Librarian to create service points on each floor, where a divisional system of arrangement is adopted. These service points, where they exist, are linked with the central service point by telephone;
- User education programmes: These may take the form of single teaching or a series of lectures spread over a long period, integration into a course structure; seminar, workshops, or demonstrations. Simple library orientation is only a part of the larger user education programme, and it ranges from an explanation of the filing system in the public card catalogue and directing users to the appropriate section of the library for a given enquiry, through how to make profitable use of abstracts and indexes to the giving of talks on bibliographies on various fields;
- Provision of information service: meeting the information needs of users has gone far beyond merely directing them (i.e. the users) to where the books should be found. The
- The current trend is for the librarian to go the extra mile to provide the real information (reference services) (Ifidon, 2000).

Serial collections division:

This section of the library helps in the management of serial publications for research purposes.

Serials are publications issued in successive parts, at regular or irregular intervals and intended to be continued indefinitely (Osborn, 1980 in Nwalo, 2003). It is the duty of the serial section of the library to ensure the acquisition and management of serial publications in the library.

The serial section functions as a library within the library. This is so because the serial performs all the traditional functions of the library. More importantly, the serial section of the library does newspaper display and storage, publication of current content etc. This unit is service oriented, that is, users continuously make demands at this unit for information relevant to their research.

The Interplay

The units of the library as noted above function in a system mode to realize the overall objectives of the library. As with other systems, the various sections interact, interrelate, are interdependent and have a common objective- user satisfaction. For example, when a book is acquired by the collection development unit it is sent to the technical services for processing and once it is processed it is immediately sent to the readers' services unit for service delivery. The administration meanwhile is in charge of disbursing the funds for the whole process. We can see from the illustration that the library structure is a collection of integrating units.

Background to Literatures of Librarianship

Opara (2010) profession must have a body of knowledge and skills based on that knowledge and extended by united effort. This attribute cuts across national and cultural boundaries. The body of knowledge and skills must be unique

to the profession and must not easily be assimilated by a non-professional. Library and information science in Nigeria and elsewhere, possesses this attribute.

The techniques of exploiting recorded communication for the fullest benefit of man constitute the core of the science and skill of library and information science. Cataloguing and classification, indexing, abstracting, bibliographies, etc. are unique to library and information science. Through empirical and comparative studies and recorded history, an organized body of knowledge has been developed in library and information science.

As in other countries, this body of knowledge is transmitted by library and information science schools in Nigeria. In Nigeria, many library and information science educators and practicing librarians in academic, research, and national libraries contribute to library and information science scholarship by performing original scholarly library and information science research and thus contribute to the academic end of the profession

Historical Perspectives and Chronological Development of Librarianship Literature

Way (2010) noted that an examination of the study results of survey conducted on librarian literature suggests that the field of Library and Information Science has failed to embrace archiving and open access as a regular practice. This result in situation where articles are not being deposited in institutional and subject repositories at a high rate, and the fact that the vast majority of items are deposited in only one repository suggests that, among those who archive, there is little concern about preservation and redundancy.

Wani, Bakshi. & Gul (2008) noted that the invention of printing in 1440 provided a tool for sharing and communicating thoughts with others in a form which led to the birth of periodicals. Right from the time when the first scholarly publication appeared in 1665 from Europe, the escalation of scholarly literature in a variety of formats is increasing with time. Various disciplines all over the world have witnessed a volcanic growth in their respective fields in terms of scholarly publications like journals, magazines, conference papers, trade publications, and monographs.

Nations all over the world have noticed an abrupt spurt in scholarly publications. Not only developed nations but the developing nations, too, from time to time and in a variety of forms have realized the need and importance of scholarly literature as they bring varied ideas from masterminds in their respective fields. Scholarly literature in the field of library and information science has been growing gradually as new facets are added to the subject progressively due to inter-disciplinary approach and information tsunami (Wani et al, 2008).

Wani, et al., (2008) further noted that the field of library and information science is no longer confined to four walls of classification and cataloguing but has been broadened to embrace new concepts like automation, information retrieval, digitization, wikis, metadata, blogging, podcasts, open access, and other web related technologies. The present study aims to trace the growth and development of library literature so that the trend followed by scholarly literature in Library Science can be visualized.

Chronological Development of Librarianship Literature

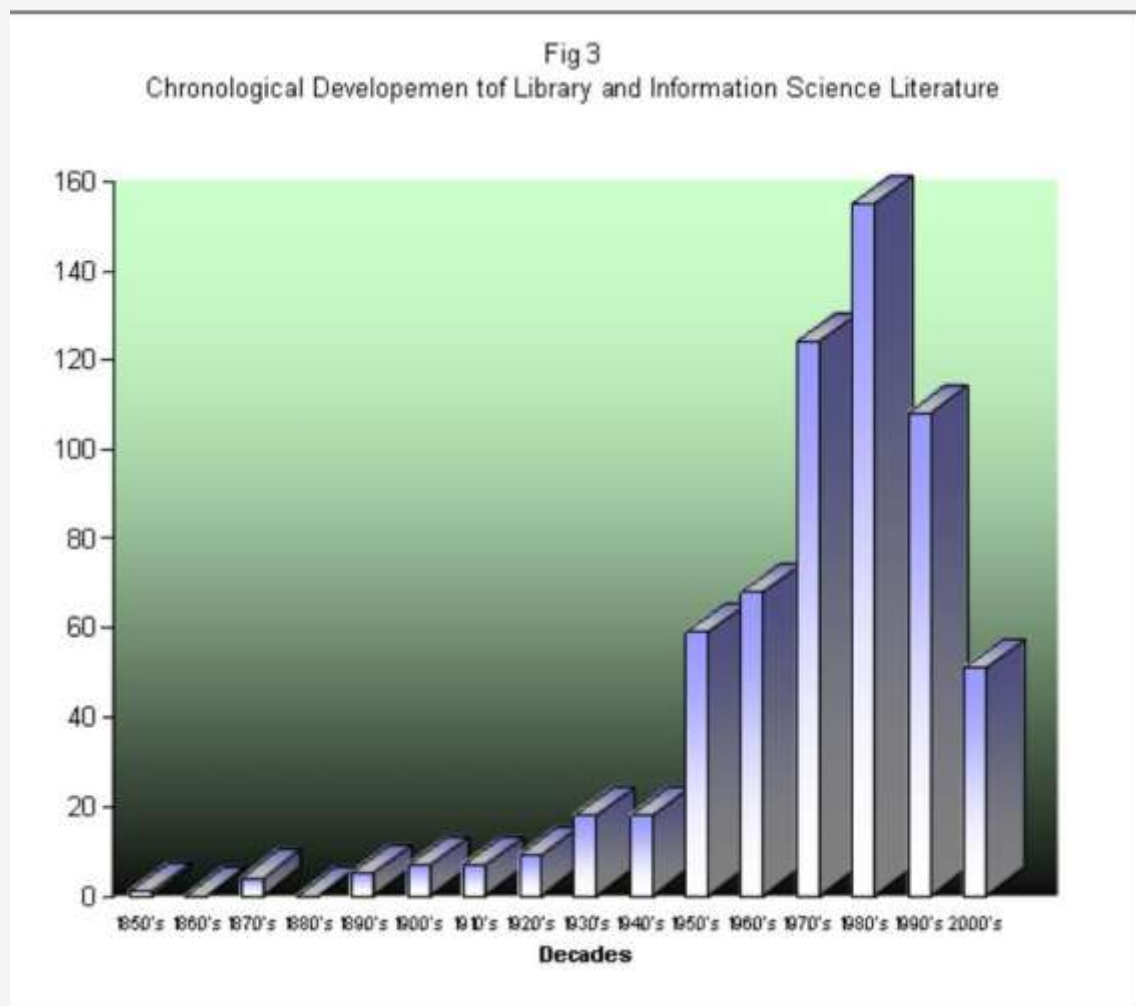


Fig 1. Chronological development of librarianship literature over decades (Source: Wani et al, 2008).

Following the development of literatures of librarianship chronologically, we can see that in the early years of the profession not much was published. From the table above it is evident that between the 1850's and 1920's not much was published. However, the significant chronological started around the 1930's. The reason for this is not farfetched because the outcome of the world wars gave birth to a scenario tagged as 'information explosion'. Librarianship was at the center of managing the information. These increase activities in librarianship activities equally gave birth to publishing in librarianship.

Wani et al (2008) noted that Library and information science literature grew right from the time when the first core trade publication "Bookseller" (abstracted now in LISTA) appeared in 1852. The first publication date of all the titles under study is taken from Ulrich's online Periodical Database. From 1852 to date, there is a tremendous increase in library literature in various forms. Chronologically, the 1980's witnessed the highest number of published documents in librarianship.

Types of Sources of Librarianship Literature

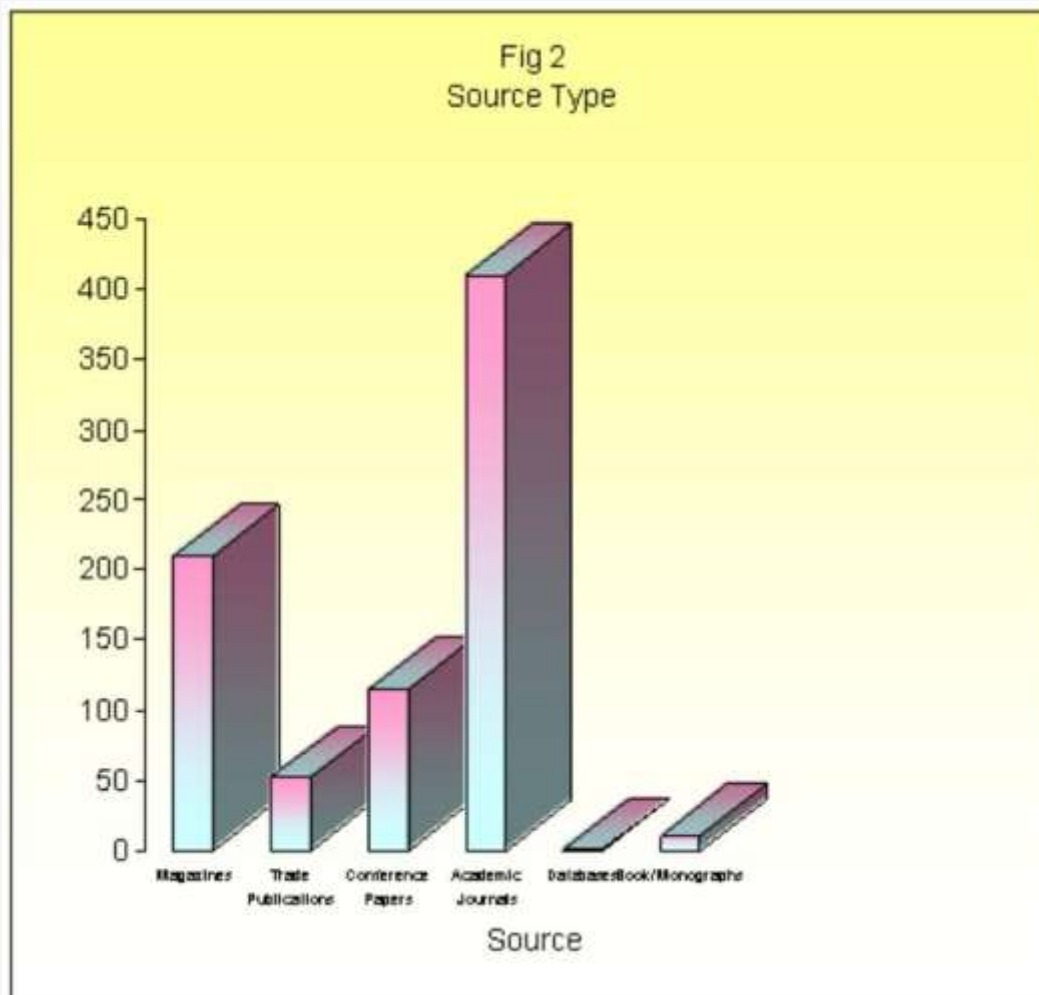


Fig. 2 types of sources of literature of librarianship (Source: Wani et al, 2008)

From the table above we can see that in librarianship the bulk of literature available are in the form of academic journals. This is so because of the race against the tide of publish or perish that taken over the librarianship profession over the years. Since librarians are now treated as academic staff in most parts of the world there is the constant demand on them to publish scholarly articles before promotion is granted to them. This has resulted in the situation where many librarians publish in academic journals. This also has led to the increase in the number of journals published in the profession. While some of the journals are indexed and peer reviewed others are not. HINARI alone has hundreds of LIS journals listed (<http://www.who.int/hinari>). Other online indexed LIS journals can be found at AJOL (<http://www.ajol.info/>).

Another type of source of literature in the field of librarianship is professional magazines. As can be seen in the diagram above magazines rank second in the type of source. Wani et al (2008) in their comprehensive study found that librarians publish most of their articles in professional magazines.

Trade literature is another type of source of librarianship literature commonly used in the circulation of librarianship information. Other types of sources of librarianship literature not frequently used are database and monograph. Librarians do not publish monograph very often.

In all we can see that there is meaningful publishing activities going on in the field of librarianship. For librarianship professionals their most common preferred sources of literature are journal articles, seminar papers, monographs, reference materials and magazines.

Geographical Distribution of Literature of Librarianship

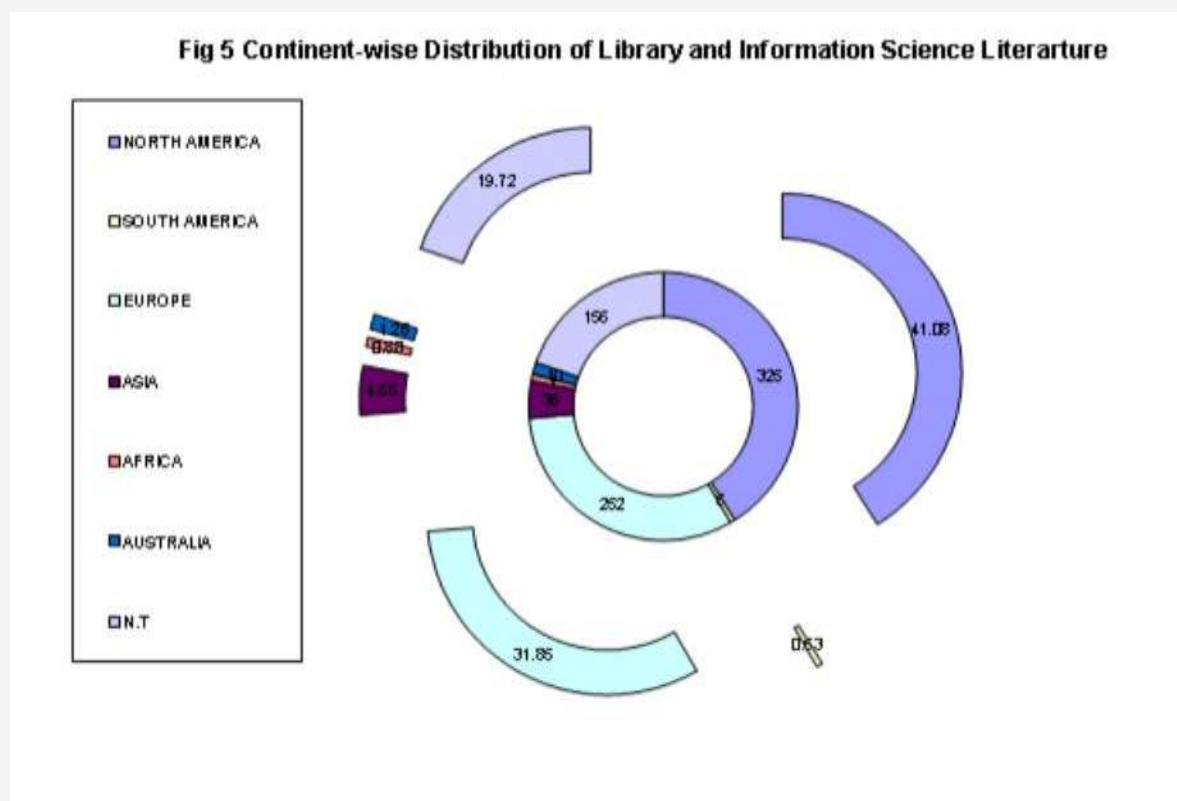


Fig. 3: Distribution of librarianship literature across continents (Source: Wani et al, 2008).

From the diagram above we can see that the greatest contribution to the literature of librarianship comes from North America. The reason for this is based on the fact that the North America region place high value on information hence the continuous efforts at ensuring that better ways are evolved in the management of information. Europe equally ranked second and closely followed by South America. What this means is that these continents are constantly doing research to advance their library environment. Little wonder countries like United States of America, Britain, Canada, India etc are at the forefront in the area of information management.

From the diagram we can see a sad reality. This is the reality of Africa's inactivity in the area of research in general and especially research in the field of librarianship. Africa contributes very little to research in the world. Factors ranging from poor educational infrastructure to policy issues are always there to limit the research output of the African region. For the library environment to turn a new leaf research efforts must be intensified.

The publishing of librarianship literature in Africa reflects the state of librarianship as a profession in Africa. For there to be growth of literature there must be a proportional growth in the practice of modern trend in librarianship as evident in civilized climes. This reality was conveyed by Neill (1991) as cited by Nwalo (2000) when he lamented that:

Government officials, planners and decision-makers exhibit an extremely low threshold of awareness with regard to the utility of information, and remain stubbornly unconvinced of its efficacy as a factor in development process. The necessary conviction that would make NATIS work is not evidenced in the top echelons of government service with people who hold the purse strings. Neither is information taken seriously at the second tier level of administrators and professionals. In general, they rarely utilize information in their day-to-day operations and more importantly, infrequently urge their employers to provide new and improved information services. Even on planning or policy document, it is no more than a declaration of good intent that is never followed through or supported with the allocation of resources.

Nwalo equally enthused that "it is serious enough that policy makers in Africa are not enthusiastic about seeking information that could improve the quality of their decisions".

This lack of interest on the part of the policy makers and general information users as reflected in the zeal of the information workers in Africa and as resulted in the unfortunate lull in publishing activities of librarianship literature in Africa.

Growth of Literature over Consecutive Years

Over consecutive years literature of librarianship across the globe has grown significantly. This was the view expressed by Wani, et al., as shown below

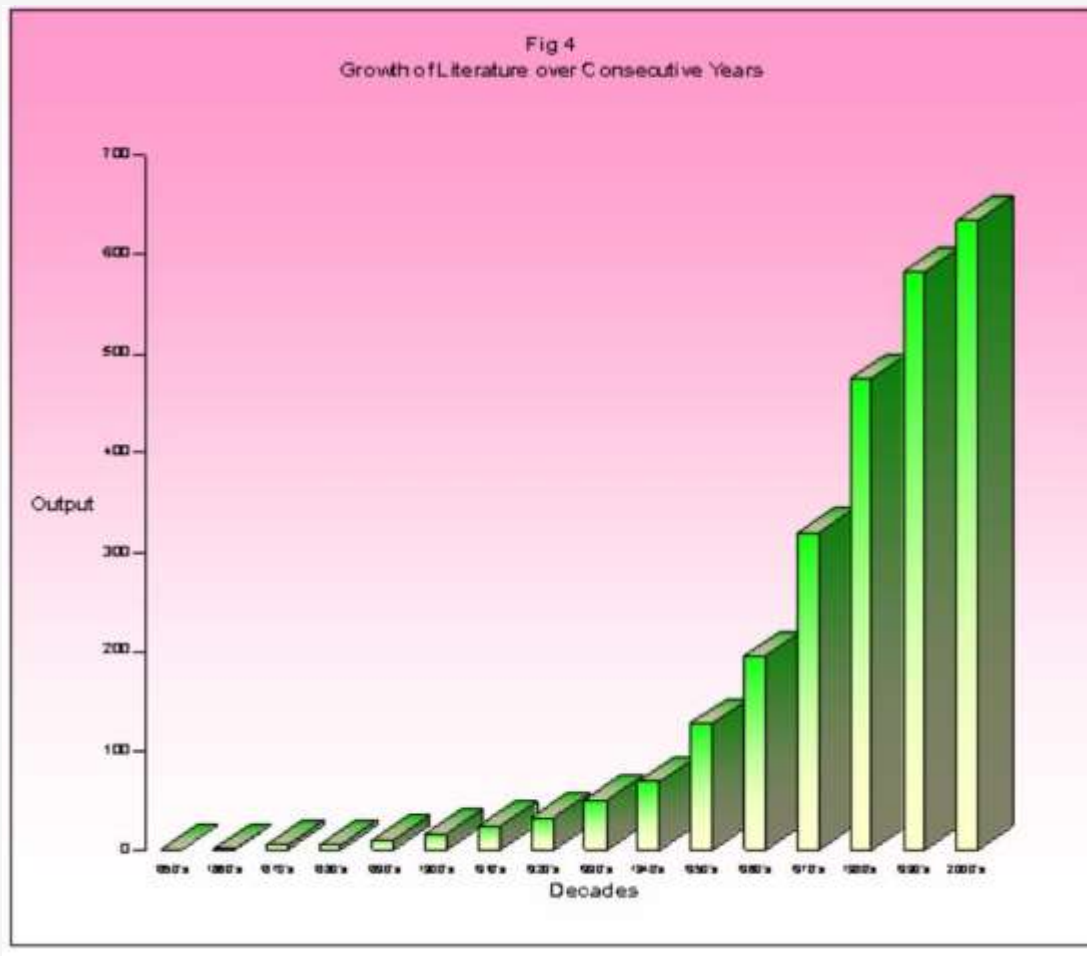


Fig. 4 the growth of librarianship literature over consecutive years (source: Wani et al, 2008).

The diagram above shows that there has been consistency in the growth of librarianship literature year after year. This is evidenced in the number of journals that getting registered by the day. Developments in the area of publishing have affected the growth of literature generally. This has resulted in the era of e-publishing. This growth over consecutive years does not automatically mean a general wellbeing for librarianship literature.

Current Trends and Future Expectations of Librarianship Literature

Wani, et al., (2008) concluded that the growth of library and information science literature is at a good pace. They also noted that developed countries are contributing a large chunk of literature through various types of publications while developing countries like India have also made laudable contributions to library and information science literature.

The chronological study indicates that library and information science literature has been expanding its subject boundaries. Most noticeably is its extensive coverage of IT-related services since 1980. The maturity of the scientific aspect of the library science discipline has helped in increasing the literary output in the field of library and information science.

It must also be noted that the countries with a well established tradition in the field of LIS are showing an explosive growth in the LIS literature. Literature is making itself available in different forms. In the years to come, not only academic journals will be stealing the show but other forms like trade publications, monographs, and conference proceedings are also expected to reach the zenith in the field. This, however will not be the case in underdeveloped countries like Africa except decisive steps are taken to encourage scholarship and publishing in the field of librarianship.

The Nature and Effects of the Problems of Libraries

In the course of rendering services and performing their duties libraries encounter certain difficulties. While some of these problems are general others are peculiar to certain regions. The rate at which each library copes in the face of these problems depends on the rate of their preparedness and commitment.

The prevalence of these problems is capable of incapacitating the efforts of librarians and information managers. Owing to this fact many libraries in the third world countries found it very hard to render effective and efficient services to their clientele. A lot of researches have been carried out to understudy these problems with a view to proffering probable solutions to them.

We shall quickly look at some of the common problems of libraries.

Common Problems of Libraries in Africa

Socio-cultural circumstances:

Librarians function majorly as their environments dictate. Ahiazu (2006) rightly observed that “the cultural environment is very crucial for the performance of leadership role of the librarian. Culture determines how members of a society think and feel, it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. It includes the collection of ideas and habits, which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. The individual’s culture is his ‘design for living’. Man does not have instincts to direct his actions and so his behaviour derives from his culture”. The Nigerian librarian is in an environment where little value has been placed on information and its management; this greatly affects how he functions. Business policy makers are yet, in most cases, to realize the role information plays in good policy formulation. To this end little or no support is given to the librarians. This point was greatly noted by Ifidon (2006) in his inaugural lecture. He identified the lack of information management and use by Nigerian policy makers as the bane of national development.

Culturally, most African countries rely on oral tradition for knowledge acquisition, storage and dissemination (Amadi, 1981 as cited by Ahiazu, 2006). Reading culture and the book trade are generally alien to the African way of life.

Amadi (1981) further observed that African reactions to all imported media “... whether they be books, films, radio, or television...do tend to be different to the extent that African audiences differ psychologically from others”. Consequently, it appears that the majority of Africans are yet to come to terms with the importance of the library system as a source of information or knowledge. It should not be too surprising to find poorly funded public, and academic libraries in most African countries.

Ahiazu (2006) further noted that in Nigeria, for instance, public libraries are found only in the big cities and some urban centers while rural communities hardly own anything like a library or own a community reading room with basic reference books. The rural communities themselves and sometimes the urban dwellers, rarely think that they are losing anything at all by not owning a public or branch library in their area, and so there is nothing wrong in their absence.

A rural community in Nigeria will rather request for any project to be sited by the government or any donor agent other than request for the provision of a library. This culture inadvertently extends to the attitudes of policy makers and heads of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. For instance, once there is any cash squeeze, in the funding of an institution, the first causality is the library system. The librarian's leadership and persuasive qualities may have little or nothing to change the situation.

The non-book tradition and poverty force, majority of Nigerian children to go through this kind of experience and so, when they become adults holding positions of authority, the importance of the library system hardly crosses their minds naturally. After all, they made it even as Chief Executives of these higher institutions of learning without using any public or community library. Consequently, the administrative "policy" for such a library seems to be saying that "the students should purchase their textbooks, concentrate on them and they would come out successful in their semester examinations".

Technological divide and poor ICT knowledge

Another problem of libraries is in the area of the technology divide that exist between the developed world and third world countries. Nigeria for example is presently struggling with adapting modern technologies. Most information management activities still have to be done with either manual or obsolete technologies in most cases. Also, most of the librarians in underdeveloped nations lack the requisite ICT knowledge required to drive ICT infrastructure where they are available.

Nwalo (2001) while looking at the issue of ICT noted equally that computer engineers and technologists are still very few in Africa relative to the demand. The result is that the cost of maintenance of automated library systems becomes prohibitive as libraries compete for the services of the very few maintenance personnel available in their localities. Many attempts at library automation in African countries are known to have failed because of system maintenance problems.

Elisha (2006) posited that the poor ICT knowledge among both users and professional librarians in Nigeria makes it difficult for the libraries to go far in their application of ICT. Elisha citing Gates Foundation (2005) further noted that "many libraries are lacking resources and technical support and staff needing continuously to acquire appropriate training in order to deliver up-to-date services and trouble shoot equipment". Without the relevant ICT skills, the Nigerian librarian can do little or nothing in performing his role in supplying business managers with relevant information.

Poor Funding

Another major challenge faced by most libraries in the developing and underdeveloped world is that of poor funding. Both governments owned libraries and business libraries face this problem. While government libraries maybe underfunded due to poor leadership and government policies, business libraries are not given a high priority in the organizations' budgets. Funding therefore poses a great challenge to information management for policy making.

Elisha (2006) observed that "the problem of poor funding is listed by various studies such as Ani et al, 2005; Okiy, 2005; and Ashcroft and Watts, 2005". This goes on to show the negative impact poor funding has in the work of the information management in the third world countries. Poor funding expresses itself in different areas such as poor power supply, poor human resources development, and poor state of telecommunication and roller ICT infrastructure and the virtual nonexistence of ICT policies.

Without the necessary funding, none of the other problems facing ICT application in our libraries could effectively be solved. Also, without increased funding, all advances such as in human resource development are surely doomed (Elisha, 2006).

Low Level of ICT Literacy

It must be noted that the library exists mainly to serve the clientele. If the library wants become ICT driven one issue that must be considered is that of the ICT literacy level of the users of the library.

Elisha (2006) observed that Poor ICT knowledge is a severe challenge to Nigerian libraries. This makes it difficult for them as users and patrons of academic libraries to make full use of available ICT facilities. This problem is further aggravated by the “shortage of technology literate staff in libraries, the lack of skilled human resources to install and manage technology networks and poor funding to attract such staff or develop such skill in existing staff. [Policy making staff have a] serious lack of awareness of computer capabilities and computer skills are low. The poor ICT knowledge among both users and professionals in Nigeria makes it difficult for the academic libraries to go far in effective delivery of library services.

Igun (2006) posited that studies of libraries in general and university libraries in particular have consistently reported inadequate levels of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) literacy as one of the major problems facing libraries in Nigeria as they move into the 21st century. ICT infrastructure development and poor funding have been identified as problems, followed by poor ICT skills among staff

Poor ICT Infrastructure

In his study on the climate of information management in Africa in the 21st century, Nwalo (2001) noted that modern information management requires a fairly well developed information infrastructure especially electricity and the telephone. He further noted that these basic infrastructures which are already taken for granted in the developed world are unfortunately poorly provided for in Africa.

The state of power supply in most African countries is enough reason to have an anaemic information system. Nwalo noted that apart from South Africa and a few Southern African countries like Botswana and Namibia, power supply in most other areas is epileptic. In Nigeria, for example, power supply is so erratic that it is generally believed that it is normal to have 'black out' and abnormal to have uninterrupted power supply for up to one hour. This is to say nothing of the rural areas, which though harbour over 80% of the country's population are, in most cases, yet to be provided with electricity. If this trend persists what we call the library in the third world countries will be nothing but moribund, anemic and ineffective information houses.

The power situation in most African countries is at a disastrous state because of the monopoly or government ownership of the sole means of power generation and distribution. This was appropriately noted by Nwalo (2000) when he commented that the sole electricity corporation in Nigeria, the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) has dashed the hope of many, not just at industrialization but in the efficient management of hospitals, sports stadia, libraries and other such facilities requiring electricity to power their machines and other electrical and electronic devices.

Inadequacy of Information Resources

The library as we earlier on noted is an information system. The primary raw materials of a library are the information materials. A library with a beautiful structure and well trained staff without information resources is like a gun without bullets. The case that is prevalent in the third libraries is where you find grossly inadequate and obsolete information resources in the library. This situation poses as a great problem to the library.

Ifidon (2000) noted that “Where a university library in the developed world, such as University of Nottingham, can boast of 307 volumes of books and 0.51 periodical per reader, Nigeria can make do with only two books and 0.3 periodical per reader”. Ifidon further noted that “Interlibrary loan facilities would have been a welcome relief. But these are virtually nonexistent. This is not surprising, because each library would rather use its limited facilities to meet the needs of its immediate community before extending its lending facilities to other libraries”. This inadequacy of information resources poses a grave challenge to effective rendering library services by African libraries.

User Frustration

The concept of ‘the user is king’ found in the current literature of information studies presuppose that the needs of the user should be the primary focus of the information provider. If the user is unable to use the information resources then the work of the librarian is not complete.

Unomah as far back as 1986 did an excellent study on users' frustrations occasioned by the unavailability of the items they want. According to Unomah, six major factors account for this. These are:

- failure of the library to acquire the desired item;
- failure of the user to locate an item on the shelf even though it is listed in the catalogue;
- failure of the user to locate the properly shelved item on the shelf because of the user's carelessness;
- failure of the user to locate an item in the catalogue even though it was acquired;
- failure on the part of the library staff to properly keep and display records of books that are in the bindery;
- Restricted access to certain collections such as the research collections whose use is open to only final year students and researchers. Automation of library processes is still in its infancy (Unomah, 1986).

The implication of this problem of user frustration is that the library is constantly underused. This is due to the fact that the user does not see the library as a viable place to look for information.

Remedies

Resource Sharing and Networking

An effective way of solving the problems related to inadequate information resources is resource sharing and networking. Ahmed (2009) posited sharing of library resources means that one library uses the resources of other libraries and vice versa. As such, a group of libraries working together in cooperation for a common purpose of mutual benefit can be termed as “resources sharing system.

In effect, the entire resources of all the participating libraries become a common pool with unlimited extension of their boundaries to the extent they have agreed to share their resources.

Ahmed further noted that the present race between knowledge and book production has made it impossible for any library, however big it may be, to acquire all the printed literature in the world even on the smallest area of the spectrum of knowledge, or to cope with even a fraction of the daily production of literature. According to Sangal ‘it is estimated that scientific literature is growing with geometrical progression and is doubling every ten years or so’. If appropriately done, resource sharing and networking has the capacity to alleviate the burden of inadequate information resources.

Technology Transfer

The transfer of technology will be useful in dealing with the problem of ICT inefficiency in the libraries in Africa. Nwalo (2001) advocated technology transfer as a way of solving most of the ICT related problems. According to him “the libraries need to be at the vanguard of technology transfer from the developed world to the developing economies of Africa. To meet this expectation, the African library must provide a link between local researchers, teachers and scholars and their counterparts in other parts of the world. Internet connectivity, for example, is about the surest way of achieving this objective. All users of the Internet enjoy a whole range of services such as electronic mail, file transfer protocol, database access, and so on”.

Increased Funding

The authorities in charge of budgeting must deliberately create space for library development in the in the budgets. Until this is done finance is going to remain a great problem of the library and library development. Government should increase the quota of the budget allotted to library development. Since information is key to development and the library is the main manager of information, it is important that the funding of libraries be taken seriously.

User Education

Since the libraries exist primarily because of the users- books are for use-S.R Ranganathan- the user must therefore be adequately educated on how to maximize the information resources in the library. The information managers should endeavor to organize orientation programs for its users.

Collection Development

It must be noted that the collections (of information materials) are the raw materials which library services are rendered. It is important therefore for library managers to take the continuous acquisition of recent information materials as a major priority. The librarian must acquire materials along the needs of the library user. This is possible through regular community study/analysis. Once the needs of the clientele are determined the librarian should continuously acquire information sources to meet the needs.

Nwalo (2000) noted that to provide their users access to the best of teaching and research materials available in the world, timely, and at least cost, African libraries must automate their services and form networks. Most of the problems associated with acquisitions and collection management in general would be over for African libraries once they are on the web

Periodic Training of Librarians in the Use of Modern Technologies

The information management environment in the 21st century is ICT prone. For librarians to remain relevant in the world of information management they must be regularly trained and retrained in the use of modern technologies. In this regard Nwalo (2000) noted that “conscious of the manpower problem, libraries all over Africa have been exposing their staff to computer literacy programmes. Some have also been sending selected staff to specialized training on computer information management locally and overseas. Kenneth Dike library, University of Ibadan has had cause to send two of its key automation staff to Britain for training at a very high cost”.

Conclusion

From the foregoing we can see that the library is a crucial element in the making of any society. The roles the library plays in national development and the life of the individuals within any community are enormous. Apart from providing information for education, enlightenment, entertainment, cultural development; the library serves as an agency for social change.

The library as an institution helps in the provision of various services. These services are rendered through the establishment of structures (both functional and organizational structures). A favorable interplay within the structure is needed to guarantee effective and efficient service delivery. The literature of librarianship is growing geometrically although bulk of it still comes from the developed countries. There is great lull in research in the area of librarianship in Africa. This calls for action because the situation is detrimental to the development of the profession in the region. It must be noted that no country can rise above its level of research.

In performing their tasks, librarians encounter numerous problems. Most of the problems ravaging the library environment- such as: finance, policy issues, attitude issues etc are peculiar to the third world countries. Decisive actions must be taken to rescue the library in this region from eventual collapse.

In conclusion, it is pertinent for librarians to periodically evaluate the state of the profession as against current realities. Such professional examination will result in innovations that will lead the profession to its land of bliss.

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